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Media Practitioners and Public Opinions on Interactive Broadcast TV Shows in Africa: Citizen TV (Kenya) and Muvi TV (Zambia)

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PiMA Working Papers

The PiMA Working Papers are a series of peer-reviewed working papers that present findings and insights from Centre of Governance and Human Rights' (CGHR) Politics and Interactive Media in Africa (PiMA) research project (2012-14).

The project, jointly funded by the ESRC and DFID (ES/J018945/1), focuses on expressions of 'public opinion' in broadcast media via new information and communication technologies (ICT) such as mobile phones in Kenya and Zambia. PiMA examines the political implications of such interactions in the two African countries, with a view to drawing conclusions of wider significance to practitioners and policymakers.

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Abstract

*Interactive TV and radio shows are popular phenomena in Kenya and Zambia. Drawing primarily from interview- and observation based research in TV stations in Kenya and Zambia, this paper examines the role of media practitioners in shaping interactive broadcast programmes, and the nature and possibilities of audience participation. Looking at the cases of Muvi TV's *The Assignment* in Zambia and *Power Breakfast* and *Cheche* on Kenya's Citizen TV, it considers the agency of the host and presenter of interactive shows. This working paper analyses the various ways that hosts implement ground rules for appropriate behaviour of audience members and seek to create space for different voices. It then turns to analyse the constraining effects of the wider political and regulatory environment in the two countries, for instance, Zambia as a 'Christian nation' and a relatively peaceful country, and Kenya as a 'volatile nation' due to insecurity, including terrorism-related threats and ethnic tensions. In so doing, this paper finds that despite structural factors and individual limitations, the hosts of these shows see themselves, and have been seen by audiences, guests and political elites, as key drivers and celebrities that shape access and nature of participation.*

Introduction

With a focus on interactive programmes on selected TV stations in Kenya and Zambia, the overall question this working paper seeks to answer is: What role do media practitioners play in creating, convening and mediating interactive broadcast programmes as venues that can support more participatory, inclusive and accountable democratic politics? Specifically, the paper probes the following questions: How do show hosts, panellists and related practitioners conduct and control interactivity? How are the roles and influences of hosts perceived both by the hosts themselves and by interested parties? What factors influence the way in which hosts manage 'their' shows? What are the constraints that impact on the independence and integrity of hosts? What are some of the ethical issues that arise in the manner in which hosts carry out their duties? Interactivity is taken here to mean audience on-air contact with stations using modern information and communication technology (ICT) devices (specifically mobile phones, and related applications, software and platforms, such as SMS and social media) for the expression and enablement of opinions, particularly about politics and development, on radio and TV programmes designed for that purpose.

This paper takes a qualitative approach. The analysis is derived mainly from a combination of off-studio monitoring, in-studio observation and archive review of a selection of shows, interviews and social media comments collected as part of the collaborative Politics and Interactive Media (PiMA) research study, involving researchers from the University of Cambridge, University of Nairobi and University of Zambia.¹ The focus on practitioners is just one aspect of the PiMA study, which examines the nature and implications of citizens' participation in interactive broadcasts on political accountability, political control, inclusion of marginalized people and the quality of democratic electoral politics.

Media Practitioners and Theory

Relevant theories linked to the subject of this paper include watchdog and gate-keeping concepts of journalism and political economy theory of media, especially the propaganda model. In the functionalist libertarian watchdog approach, it is assumed that news and opinion outlets and practitioners, as an independent 'fourth estate', prioritise citizen interests and voices while keeping in check the excesses of powerful elites in the executive, legislature and judiciary. In the gate-keeping concept, practitioners' decisions to give voice or access are not necessarily seen to be driven by public interest given the influence of various factors, including personal interests, attitudes and backgrounds, professional practice routines/cultures, and outside players and environments (Shoemaker, 1991). Political economy's propaganda model (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) goes on to suggest that 'filters' (i.e. ownership, advertising, sources, 'flak' and demonisation) result in the manufacture of consent for the benefit of commercial and political elites, turning practitioners into 'lap dogs' instead of 'guard dogs' barking against corruption and other ills. For talk shows, the audiences may end up being unwitting participants in the acquiescence – especially in an environment like Kenya where "the main incentives driving the opening of these stations was neither developmental, nor even political. It was commercial" (Abdi & Dean, 2008, p. 4). To this end, practitioners play a crucial role in setting the political agenda in relation to public opinion (McCombs, 2004). It is in this context that this paper examines the extent to which TV practitioners shape interactive shows in Kenya and Zambia, with a focus on popular privately owned stations. In the African context, our case studies augment recent work that recognise the crucial

¹ Thanks must be given to project P-I, Sharath Srinivasan, as well as to Alastair Fraser and Winnie Mitullah for their invaluable comments on earlier versions of this paper.

roles of practitioners in managing and shaping public participation in interactive shows (Tetty, 2011, p. 27; Willems, 2012, p. 224, 228ff).

Reinhard (n.d., p. 2) argues that “the form in which interactivity occurs is controlled by the producers of the program through ... structures [that] constrain and cue how the ... audience is expected to, allowed to and desired to engage with the program”. However, Cover (2006, p. 139) notes that “the author-text-audience relationship” is that of “struggle”. Housley and Fitzgerald (2006) point out that in practitioner-based research, “into professional activity/work by professionals or practitioners”, it is vital to consider concepts such as ‘respecification’ (i.e. examining, and making sense of, practical actions and processes) and ‘accountability’ (i.e. how members of a given interactive and linguistic *activity* such as *talk* make their actions praxiologically and reflexively recognisable and understandable) in an institutional context. It is in this view of practitioner interventions and influence that we here make our contribution to “analyses to mediated socio-political practices built ... upon practical reasoning and interaction” (Fitzgerald & Housley 2010, p. 1).

Specifically, the analysis adopted here is a socio-political (less media-centric) ‘auteur’ (author) approach – borrowed from Film Studies – which is closely linked to the concepts of ‘genre’ and ‘star’, with focus on four key considerations (Philips, 2012):

1. The media practitioner is a primary creative force – especially where the media figure comes across as ‘strong’;
2. Individual personality/style or ‘personal touch’, influenced by practitioner worldview, is discernible;
3. Technical or technological competencies or preferences of the practitioner contribute to production; and
4. The practitioner ‘stamp’ or ‘signature’ impacts on meaning or interpretation, based on thematic and stylistic considerations.

In the approach we adopt here, we suggest that socio-political context can play a significant role in shaping practitioner behaviours and actions. Although auteur theory-method is an agency approach usually applied to a film director who is normally not an actor (Philips, 2012), we use it here because often it is hosts who ‘direct’ interactive shows with the support of production and management teams. We further take into consideration the fact that even though hosts and panellists are sometimes difficult-to-manage ‘stars’ in society, genre theory notion draws our attention to the fact that interactive broadcast texts are ‘products’ influenced by not only commercial imperatives but also historical, political, legal-regulatory, social/cultural and professional environments.

Background and Contexts

Brief on countries and media ecologies

Kenya, East Africa’s largest economy with an estimated population of 44.4 million and density of 78 people per square kilometre in early 2014, has in recent years experienced unprecedented volatility and pressure on resources among its more than 40 ethnic communities, compared to the larger multi-ethnic southern African country of Zambia, with an estimated population of 14.5 million and density of around 20 per square kilometre in 2014 (CIA, 2014; World Bank, 2014). While the largest ethnic group commands about the same percentage of the population in each country (22 percent Kikuyu in Kenya and 21 percent Bemba in Zambia²), perceptions of domination by this ethnic group has been greater in Kenya than in Zambia. For this reason, in the agitation for political and constitutional changes that have dominated public discourses in both countries, ethnic tinged historical grievances or ‘injustices’ have been greater in Kenya than in Zambia. Media outlets, content and practitioners have naturally been drawn into these socio-political realities and public perceptions.

While the mainstream news media in Kenya is predominantly private-owned, a number of the owners are politicians and many of the directors and top managers, even where ownership may be in the hands of businesspeople, have been aligned to the ruling elite - often with ethnic positioning. While *Royal Media Services* (RMS) may be considered an exception, they have struggled to buck the trends of content homogenisation and structural consolidation in a highly commercialised and politicised environment. Most of these news media outlets either avoided rocking the boat or joined the bandwagon of uncritical peace-preach amidst some fundamental flaws in the 2013 electoral system. In 2014, mainstream TV gave a blackout to a major opposition rally when the

2 Based on CIA 2014. Figures in the last official but controversial 2009 census results, released in August 2010, had about 11 ethnic groups forming nearly 90 percent of the population: Kikuyu (17.1 percent); Luhya (13.8 percent); Kalenjin (12.9 percent); Luo (10.5 percent); Kamba (10.1 percent); Kenyan Somali (6.2 percent); Kisii (5.7 percent); Mijikenda (5.1 percent); Meru (4.3 percent); Turkana (2.6 percent); and Maasai (2.2 percent).

Coalition for Reform and Democracy (CORD) leader returned from a visit to the USA, but made a huge spectacle of President Uhuru Kenyatta's return from attending his crimes-against-humanity case at the Hague International Criminal Court (ICC) due to his alleged role in the 2007/08 post-election violence. At other times, for instance during the Westgate mall terrorist siege in 2013, TV has been key in exposing spectacles of government failing. Powerful vested interests have frustrated government attempts to implement globally recognised controls on cross-media ownership. [Mediamax Network](#), linked to President Kenyatta, recently added Kameme FM and other radio stations to its newspaper, *The People* and TV station, K24 and joined the other big cross-media players, [The Nation Media Group](#) (NMG), [The Standard Group](#) (SG), RMS and [Radio Africa Group](#) (RAG). With the rise of these media giants and media moguls came the death of ruling party-owned *Kenya Times* newspaper and the reduction in influence of state-owned [Kenya Broadcasting Corporation](#) (KBC) and the expansion of space for political discourse in spite of concerns about negative convergence. In early 2015, the 'big three' – NMG, SG and RMS – had their TV channels off air for 18 days over long-standing dispute on digital signal distribution and control with regulator Communications Authority of Kenya.

In Zambia, concentration is narrower with ruling elite control over mainstream state news media, and changing allegiances of key private media, resulting in vibrant online-only political and investigative news outlets such as [Zambian Watchdog](#) and [Zambia Reports](#) which have at times faced government harassment over their reporting. After successfully breaking the monopoly of state-owned [Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation](#) (ZNBC), *Times of Zambia* and *Zambia Daily Mail*, hitherto radical Fred M'membe's *The Post* became close to the ruling Patriotic Front (PF) from its victory in 2011 until late August 2014 when, following the sacking of stalwart Wynter Kabimba, they started carrying editorials openly attacking the party and "absentee landlord" President Michael Sata before he died in October 2014. The only other mainstream private national news outlet, [Muvi TV](#), has not been as embroiled in ruling party politics factions ahead of 2016 general election but provides a major space for public discourse. Similar to Kenya, constitutional reforms, and regional-ethnic resource and power balancing are key issues in Zambia – and broadcast media talk shows are major sites for debating them in both countries where political rivals at times complement media propaganda with 'youth' (Kenya) or 'cadre' (Zambia) intimidation and violence (Simutanyi et al, 2015).

In both countries, the media environment has become increasingly networked and converged, with various connections between digital and conventional media – with TV stations and some of their adored 'auteurs' constantly to the public via websites, social media (Twitter and Facebook) and messaging service (SMS). When it comes to interactive shows, in which audiences have a chance to make a contribution, a key driver has been the mobile phone, a common node for internet connectivity, whose use has expanded rapidly in the past few years as fixed lines declined (See Mitullah et al, 2015; Simutanyi et al, 2015).

Citizen TV [Kenya] and Muvi TV [Zambia]

RMS station, [Citizen TV](#), and Muvi TV, the most watched private general-audience national TV stations in the case study countries, happen to have some sort of programme-exchange working relationship – and recently Citizen TV expanded its free-to-air service to Zambia, having made a similar move to Uganda. Citizen TV has in recent years on average commanded about half the market share in terms of reach and viewership ahead of rivals, NMG's Nation TV (NTV), SG's Kenya Television Network (KTN), KBC, RAG's Kiss TV and Mediamax's K24, roughly in that order (see, for instance, Ipsos Synovate, 2011 and 2012). In Zambia, where reliable market data are hard to come by, Muvi TV's only free-to-air rival is ZNBC.

Both Citizen TV and Muvi TV emphasise local programming – with Muvi TV declaring on its website that it "exists as a reflection of the Zambian people's hope, pride ..." with a "mandate to ensure that at least 60% of our content is locally produced...". Citizen TV broadcasts in Kenya's official language, English, and the national language, Kiswahili, and drawing from our interactions with station owners and presenters, and from the station's programmes, it mainly targets *mwananchi*, Kiswahili for the ordinary/common person. Citizen TV's focus on 'local programmes' and interactive broadcasts changed the Kenyan mediascape from around the mid 2000s, enabling it to increase its popularity and gain viewers, especially from the older stations, KBC and KTN (Mwanzia, 2009, p. 16). They succeeded by "abandoning postcolonial approaches and becoming decidedly local in both voice and content" (WAN-IFRA & AMI 2011, p. 5). Similarly, Muvi TV's top practitioner-manager, Phiri, said they downplayed top-down approach in order to "empower ordinary Zambians" by focusing on "their challenges, their problems" (Phiri, 2012a).

Although Muvi TV was found to be the third most trusted in the radio and TV category behind subscription-based Multichoice (DSTV) and Hot FM in the October 2014, according to the [most trusted Zambian company](#) contest by [Africa Trust Academy](#), its news is perceived to be more credible among audiences than ZNBC (see Wasserman & Mbatha, 2012). On its part, Citizen TV projects itself

as independent and non-partisan – but RMS proprietor and chairman, S. K. Macharia has openly supported reform politics, although he has indicated he does so in his personal capacity. Macharia was a member of the top-level organ, ‘the summit’ of the CORD coalition, which lost the presidential election in 2013. Following this, Macharia appeared at a crucial press conference with CORD leaders. Further, Muvi TV and Citizen TV cannot be completely independent due to commercial, political and regulatory pressures – such as past conflict between Citizen TV owners, RMS, and the regulator over radio frequency allocations and usage. All the same, both stations are well resourced, boasting a variety of talented and/or trained staff of varying ages and backgrounds, some working as part-time presenters or consultants on specific shows such as the ones under study.

Interactive programming: Politics and governance

Media practitioners and stations in Kenya and Zambia have had to become accustomed to SMS software and tablet computers to access, read, display and archive audience contributions to various interactive shows (see, for instance, Abdi & Deane, 2008, p. 4; Mbeke 2010, p. 29; Njogu 2013, p. xii). Muvi TV, launched in 2006, started using SMS in 2007 (Tembo, 2011) and since then the practitioners have sought to ‘connect’ with the audience:

For us what has built us is interaction with the people ... we have looked at innovative means of ensuring that we get immediate feedback ... The system you saw this evening is what we have always done, but I think for now it's in a more organised manner, in a more systematic manner, because in the past it would just be a phone, somebody seated in the background who is writing but now the difference is that people are able to see their SMSs, people feel they are part of the management and operations of Muvi TV, because when they write they will see their message and they believe that they are us, so you realise that the platform we have created is for the person who is seated in the house to be able to be part of the programme so I think that is what we have done. (Phiri, 2012a)

While many of the often-live interactive shows, such as *The Big Breakfast* (Kiss 100 FM – Kenya), focus on social issues, a number of shows, such as *Let the People Talk* (Radio Phoenix – Zambia), discuss contemporary politics and governance issues, especially around election time. The morning and evening discussion-based interview TV shows, such as *The Assignment* on Muvi TV, *Top Stories* on ZNBC, *Power Breakfast / Cheche* on Citizen TV, *Good Morning Kenya* and *The Platform* on KBC, *Alfajiri* and *On the Bench* with Jeff Koinange on K24 (before he quit to host *Jeff Koinange Live* on KTN) and *AM Live* (NTV), feature viewer contributions mostly via on-screen scrolling or on-air reading of messages from SMS and social media, and on rare occasions via phone-ins.

Household surveys through the PiMA project in four rural and urban constituencies around mid 2013 showed that, on average, 88.5 percent of the respondents in the selected Kenya sites listened to, or watched, and/or participated in interactive broadcast programmes (radio and TV), compared to 50 percent among Zambian respondents. There was more disparity between rural and urban respondents in the two Zambian sites (40 percent rural, 60 percent urban) than in Kenya ones (92 percent rural, 85 percent urban). Among respondents in the two Kenya sites who listened to these kinds of shows, 22.5 percent participated by phoning or texting in, while in Zambia the participation rate was 14 percent – again with greater locational/urbanity disparity in Zambia (11 percent rural, 17 percent urban) compared to Kenya (21 percent rural, 19 percent urban). Whereas these were not national surveys, thus results should not be generalised or extrapolated, it is worth noting that only 24 percent of Kenyans live in rural areas compared to 39 percent in Zambia in spite of equal urbanisation rate (4 percent) in both countries (CIA, 2014) – and that in Kenya radio and TV stations are predominantly based in major cities and towns even if they broadcast in local languages or target specific localities, but practitioners often reach out to audiences through occasional commercial-entertainment road shows such as RMS ‘Peace Caravans’³ before the March 2013 general election.

Concerning the gender of audience participants, PiMA survey findings indicate that overall men have participated more than women in interactive shows – regardless of country or urbanity. However, when combining respondents who participated with those who listened or viewed but did not participate, gender disparity was zero among respondents in the Kenyan urban constituency with male respondents just slightly more likely to participate in the rural one. In Zambia, men were nearly twice as likely to participate in the urban constituency and about one third more likely to participate in the rural constituency. The surveys also looked at participation in terms of age, education, income and mobile phone possession/ownership (Abreu Lopes et al., 2015).

3 Highlights of these tours were covered on Citizen TV prime time news – for example on 26 February 2013.

In essence, the data from the PiMA surveys and interviews suggest participation in interactive shows is especially linked to listener-viewer social and socio-psychological relationships to the show – for example the extent to which they trust and like the station and the show, their awareness of others who listen, watch and/or participate, and their perception about the presenters. Indeed media practitioners, especially hosts, co-hosts and panellists, are key drivers of these mostly morning and evening shows (see, for example, Abdi & Deane, 2008; Tolmay, 2006) – hence the focus on them in this paper.

Methodology

Citizen TV and Muvi TV were selected due to their significance in the case study countries in terms of popularity and local programming fortes, as set out in the background section above. The shows *Power Breakfast / Cheche* (Citizen TV) and *The Assignment* (Muvi TV) were chosen not only due to their flagship statuses but also because of their particular foci on politics and interactivity – key aspects of the PiMA project research on broadcasting and public opinion in Africa, using content reviews, participant observation, key informant interviews, focus-group discussions and an audience survey (see Mudhai, Abreu-Lopes, et al, 2014 for more detail on the survey methodology).

To gain insight into the work and impact, perceived and possibly real, of interactive show practitioners, we interviewed key station staff, guests and viewers, reviewed a selection of the shows and made limited experimental audience contributions to test their workings. Through in-depth interviews, we captured perceptions of different respondents on the hosts and panellists. Through content review we gleaned the manifestations of the practices, influences and roles of these media practitioners. For the purpose of this paper we rely primarily on qualitative data obtained through these methods, supplemented by quantitative data from household surveys.

The term 'practitioner' is used to refer to the host, the main editorial staff charged with the responsibility of managing and leading the discussion on-air, as well as the production team and station management. By panellists we mean the regular supporting editorial practitioners who help move the discussions along, not the guest/s, who are typically high-profile actors with a role in governance who have been invited onto the show to answer hosts, panellists and audience member's questions, and usually arrive with the idea of selling themselves or an idea or practice to the audience. The interviews covered various aspects of interactive shows, but for this paper we concentrate on interview responses related to the practices, influences and roles of practitioners. Bearing in mind the weaknesses⁴ of interview as a method, we tried as much as possible to extract forthright and honest responses from the respondents.

The review of content of the shows was based on a combination of live off-studio monitoring of broadcasts, live in-studio observation of shows, and programme archives online or from off-air recordings. In both Kenya and Zambia, access restrictions to stations and their archives compelled us to adopt convenience sampling. At Citizen TV, the in-studio observations took place after the March 2013 election, mainly in April and June – mostly following a pattern of specified weekdays – with some further observations in May and October. Access came with some restrictions – especially in relation to programme recordings and audience communications considered sensitive. At Muvi TV, access was also slightly constrained, granted informally but without permission for full implementation of the original project design. We relied on conveniently selected shows, especially featuring prominent politicians, during January-February 2012, May 2012 and July 2013. Some online archives were available, especially for Citizen TV, some from before or after 2013. Qualitative content analysis and observational data enabled us to glean often-subtle contextual information that may corroborate or contradict material from interviews.

From the foregoing, it is evident that semi-ethnographic study of broadcast practice – especially TV being contrived 'performances' – can be complicated. Whatever limited access we got, we had to think about lengths and patterns of studio observations that were necessary without being too intrusive in the studios while at the same time winning enough trust for the subjects to 'forget' the researcher's presence.

In this paper, we concentrate on practitioners in two case study shows, *The Assignment* (Muvi TV) and *Power Breakfast / Cheche* (Citizen TV), interview programmes with varying levels of audience input, that tend to set political news agenda in both countries.

4 Such as low/zero anonymity, researcher effects, interviewee reactive effects and difficulties of recall.

Audience input is mainly via messages scrolling at the bottom of the screen; phone-ins in both cases are rare. On its website, Muvi TV identifies *The Assignment*, which started in 2010 (Phiri, 2012a), as one of its four talk shows. The one-hour Sunday evening (19:15-20:15) live interview “by Muvi’s vibrant and very intelligent Costa Mwansa . . . gives [viewers] a chance to interact with the guest and the presenter by texting in questions”⁵ On *The Assignment*, gallery-based practitioners tend to put on the main screen selected messages that the host reads out loud to viewers. The mallet, depicting courtroom verdict, is the symbol for *The Assignment*, which started broadcasting in 2010 riding on the success of its predecessor, *The Matter at Hand* (Phiri, 2012a). The host usually ends the show by hitting the table with the mallet, court-judge style.

Aptly named *Power Breakfast*, Citizen TV’s morning news and current affairs programme (06:00 to 09:00 weekdays) features a discussion-with-guest segment dubbed ‘Power Interview’ (usually repeated later the same morning), with a special Wednesday edition dubbed *Cheche* (usually repeated in the afternoon of the same day). According to the Citizen TV website:

Power Breakfast is a morning political talk show that helps set the agenda for debate in Kenya. Issues concerning politics directly impacts [sic] people’s lives, so the *Power Breakfast Show* brings you leaders closer to you, so you can ask them the tough questions. . .⁶

While the half-hour regular ‘Power Interview’, led by a host and one panellist, is routine and at times includes non-controversial or non-political subjects, the roughly hour-long *Cheche* version that is often led by a host and two panellists is usually a deeper discussion, almost always on politics and governance. Discussions on *Cheche* have at times been subjects of parliamentary debates. Again, the Citizen TV website describes *Cheche* as follows:

One of the leading political talk shows in Kenya, *Cheche* combines in-depth discussion of current events and issues with just enough divergence added to spur opinions onward. Every show [episode], the three panellists . . . are joined by politicians or others similarly connected with affairs of . . .⁷

In our audience surveys instrument, one-tenth (six out of 60) of questions focused or touched, in some way, on media practitioners: most trusted station, show and presenter; presenter management of shows; presenter influence on show likability; likelihood, and outcome, of contacting a journalist and/or a broadcast station to raise concerns (see Abreu Lopes et al, 2015). Here, we concentrated on findings on non-survey data from fieldwork mainly during 2012-2014.

Results: Qualitative findings on programmes and interviews

This section concentrates on notable behavioural and reported data relating to media practitioners, grappling with interactive aspects of their work, drawing on the review of selected shows through in-studio observations, off-studio monitoring and examination of archives as well as from interviews. While taking into account a reasonable expectation of some practitioner action or role in a process, the focus here is on what we heard and saw, which give an idea of how these shows work and the possible significance of these interactive cultures-practices, as well as what we were told.

The predominant format for the case study shows included two types of interactive viewer input – via short text messages (SMS) to station short codes and via station/programme social media (Facebook) spaces. On Facebook, both stations regularly posted brief previews identifying prospective guests – Muvi TV on the general station page ‘Ask Muvi’ (221,360 likes in March 2015) and Citizen TV on a more specific ‘Power Breakfast Show’ page (46,500 Facebook page ‘likes’ March 2015) rather than the main ‘Citizen TV Kenya’ page (1.5 million ‘likes’ March 2015). For each of the shows, Facebook comments were typically no more than 50 per episode, often ranging from 10 to 20. The number of SMS messages was usually much higher than Facebook posts. For both modes of engagement, messages were sent or posted before, during and after the show; most of the SMS engagement happened during a show. Some of the audience comments from the two platforms were selected and displayed scrolling on screen. In both shows, a production team member was assigned the responsibility to collate messages. At Citizen TV, we observed the gallery operator post

5 Station website description. Retrieved 29 October 2014 from <http://www.muvi.com/the-assignment/>

6 Locate the show in the right time slot then hover over show title at <http://www.citizentv.co.ke/schedule>, retrieved 2 February 2014.

7 Ibid.

the selected messages directly to scroll, at one point with gobbledygook possibly from keyboard typing error; however, this does not necessarily mean that this always occurred without moderation by a senior practitioner. At Muvi TV, it was clear that the gallery operator presented the collated messages to the producer, who made the final decisions. Around the time of our fieldwork, a Muvi TV producer would post on Facebook a number of questions before going live and would even invite the audience to suggest guests, topics for those guests and precise questions.

While our presence might have influenced operations at Muvi TV, the producer's heavy intervention in generating viewer participation and the power to edit-present a version of 'representative' public opinion gave him an advantage in defining the tone and topics of the show over the audience, guests *and* the host. This is very different from most of the live call-in radio shows studied in both countries where the audience have a much greater degree of control, partly due to the technical capabilities (to collect and edit messages) at the TV stations, and the human capital to carry out the tasks. This opens up the question of who exactly the auteur is within the station. It depends on whose 'stamp' is visible or dominant, and this may vary depending on episode and station; at Muvi TV, a strong combination host-producer combination was discernible while at Citizen TV the host was strong especially on *Cheche*.

We hardly saw instances where TV practitioners took calls live on-air. Of the 60 or so shows we monitored at Citizen TV, only one pre-election edition (referred to below) featured just two live call-ins. It is also worth noting that interactivity did not end with viewer input during the live broadcast, given that post-show comments extended to video-sharing and archiving sites, specifically YouTube and social media sites, especially Facebook. Some SMS relating to the show would also be received after the broadcast on the same day or during repeats. However, one subtle gate-keeping action that we noted was that in Kenya the stations did not publish public archives videos of more controversial episodes.

The 'Auteurs'

While recent audience surveys in Kenya by PiMA, and others (see Nyabuga & Booker, 2013), do not rank talk shows anywhere near top two most popular genres of news and music, there is a general perception that these discussion shows set the agenda at various levels – with Citizen TV's *Power Breakfast / Cheche* leading the pack nationally in Kenya. The practitioners are key to agenda setting, viewing themselves as agents of accountability and facilitators of representative public opinion. For example, one male practitioner from Citizen TV commented,

Certainly when I walk around, the feedback I get is, 'Thank you for asking them the difficult questions. Then the next discussion should be on this one then ask them A, B, C and D' ... We hold people accountable and we invite newsmakers to our show and on behalf of the various publics. (Amimo, 2013)

When Citizen TV promotes *Cheche* as 'the show where opinion counts', this is as much a reference to the voices of the show host and panellists as it is to the views of *wananchi* (ordinary citizens, Kiswahili). In fact our findings show that, as compared to the audience, practitioner opinion is privileged. The show's design allows primarily text-in rather than phone-ins because a significant part of the opinions that matter are those of 'opinionated panellists'.⁸ Makali (2013) notes that "it would be too cumbersome to do a call-in ... we represent a broad scope of the public opinion ... We have two panellists and a host and a guest and sometimes two guests. That is broad enough and inclusive enough".

As we have noted elsewhere (Mudhai and Mitullah, 2015), various attributes of practitioners (e.g. background, experiences, interests, preferences, attitudes, convictions, personality, etc.) influence the management and content of an interactive show. During our fieldwork, relative newcomer presenter, Johnson Mwakazi, hosted the regular *Power Breakfast* alongside veteran Mutegei Njau, who was also a co-panellist with David Makali on *Cheche* hosted by Uduak Amimo, and supported by a production team led by producers who were changed at least twice in the period.

8 Expression used by host Uduak Amimo when Mines Cabinet Secretary appeared in August 2013. Retrieved 4 May 2014 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8Xn23mlUZ0>

At Muvi TV, *The Assignment* is most associated with station's general manager Costa Mwansa, described as 'vibrant and very intelligent' in the show's online promotional blurb that includes a picture of the mean-looking host holding a mallet.⁹ The programme is his "brainchild", born "three to four years ago" to emulate "bold and aggressive" journalism that "keep[s] leaders accountable" and "dig[s] deeper and get[s] the truth" (Mwansa, 2013). Citing special editions of *The Assignment* ahead of 2011 general election, the locally trained journalist with international experience elaborated on his fortes and convictions:

That is why we have done up a set up in what is called 'assignment court' and part of my character and identity ... there are so many of us, voices may sound similar but what is it that may be distinct about me and my programme? ... Mine has a special angle ... I'm passion-driven and I don't do it for money. I love doing it because more than anything else, it has given me so much satisfaction of keeping leaders accountable and also achieving the aspect of being an advocate of change. I think people have benefited out of that.

As is the case at Citizen TV's *Power Breakfast / Cheche*, decisions about *The Assignment* are made collaboratively by the team of practitioners including those in management roles. The team includes the show's producer, Mabvuto Phiri, and also the station's operations manager as well as news and current affairs editor, and sometimes involves the station's chief executive officer, Steve Nyirenda. However, Mwansa as the host wields considerable influence. Mwansa (2013) himself asserts,

I have a percentage to share and something to say about the topics and who would be appropriate guest ... but I have a team of producers behind me. Two producers of course our editor for news; he is the head producer of this particular one. Our CEO is the executive producer based on the aspect that he is financing production costs and everything. But the production and the programme are so big that it generates a lot of interests. What we may call production team. Our board of directors down to the managing editor of the news and our head to the political desks are the ones who produce. So every week, everyone will be interested, via e-mail [they ask]: Who is the guest? What is the topic? What angles should we take? ... Some asking how sensitive it is. What angles are we taking? How do you choose the guests? Basically the news people like I say, they run with active topics of the week. Each week, since the programme runs on a Sunday ... from Monday to Saturday ... the hottest topic.

While 'interactivity value' is discernible in choices of topic and guest, Mwansa (2014) notes that one crucial consideration is commercial value: "Sometimes, we admit, we choose guests based on rating. Some people are not just good ... They may be a bit flat". Such considerations mean the host may be at times be 'sidelined': "The production team basically choose the guests and run the show. I have a bit of a say" (Mwansa, 2014). This illustrates that although Mwansa is the public face of the weekly *The Assignment*, similar to Uduak Amimo with the weekly *Cheche*, the professional and business context in which he operates as a host is much more nuanced and complex than a casual observer might imagine. Below we examine various aspects relating to the practitioner and practices of interactivity, or viewer participation, gleaned from interviews and a selection of the show episodes.

Practices and Strategies

Setting the rules/parameters of participation

Hosts usually announced ground rules for appropriate behaviour of audience members contacting a show to contribute opinion and this tended to be linked to the country's context – Zambia as a 'Christian nation' and a relatively peaceful country, and Kenya as a 'volatile nation' due to insecurity, including terrorism-related threats and ethnic tensions. The rules are usually agreed upon with a team that includes the producer. Considering Zambia, Phiri comments, "We are not an insulting country, we are a peaceful nation ... let's be moderate in our discussions" (Phiri 2012a). However, these rules can be subjective and unclear. In a number of the *The Assignment* episodes we observed host Mwansa to highlight ground rules (Muvi TV – HH, 2012; Muvi TV – Mumba, 2012) but not in one featuring former President Rupiah Banda in which there was no audience input or interaction (Muvi TV – Banda, n.d.). As in Mwansa's handing of the episode featuring Banda, the late Augustine Lungu as host did not provide ground rules or allow audience participation in another Muvi TV show, *The Matter at Hand* featuring Patriotic Front President Michael Sata (Muvi TV – Sata, n.d.). This suggests the practitioners avoided opening, or were prevailed upon to avoid opening, opportunities for interaction in episodes where the guest was 'presidential' or commanded topmost 'respect' nationally.

⁹ See *The Assignment*, retrieved 14 May 2015 from <http://www.muvi.com/the-assignment/>

Provoking or encouraging participation?

At times, practitioners appear to take some unusual steps to provoke or encourage audience participation. An example occurred in late 2012. *The Assignment* producer Phiri projected on the main screen an embarrassing audience message about a guest. This seemed to be done without prior warning being given to host, Mwansa, who looked uncomfortable as he read out the message. Interviewed about a different edition of *The Assignment*, Phiri (2012a) said:

if you are not a clever producer you lose the touch ... sometimes you need that excitement. What is the feel of the people out there about what they are watching? ... we are able to generate a question from there.

It appeared such 'shock-and-awe' screen messages were one way of showing the audience that different views could be featured on the show – and that they should perhaps not worry too much about possibilities of censorship. As a result, there might be more trust, excitement and participation.

Such an interpretation is based on the practice of reviewing SMS, as indicated by Muvi TV administrator Alfred Tembo (2011), but in the same interview a contradictory view is given – that in high pressured production environment, such as mediated election hustings, the messages can get through without much review. Tembo explains,

People text and our people send it down into the studio and then panel sees the questions on the screen about what people are asking... we do not have the time ... we just take the messages. (Tembo, 2011)

For Muvi TV administrator, Tembo, messages are reviewed, and those that appear to provoke only slip through. In contrast, for producer Phiri of *The Assignment*, strategic choices are made to excite participation:

If a question is interesting or an observation because we don't just post questions, we also post observations because to be able to allow the presenter to generate some questions from those observations. So it's a two way system, it's either you pick Facebook or you pick the SMS line. And the other thing mostly what we do if it is really a burning issue the topic can be advised a week ahead. (Phiri, 2012b)

Response given on-air or opinion/message passed on for action

The 'act' of the host passing on viewer messages off-air to guests from public and voluntary sectors for action was evident particularly on *Cheche*, where at times the intention to share viewer input after the show was 'performed' on-air. This approach is different from the routine one, in which hosts select messages to put to the guests on-air, or provides on-air contact details of an organisation or department the guest represents. This happens in shows of great public interest, such as Judiciary's services (Citizen TV – Shollei, 2013), and sponsored shows, such as a Transparency International series on corruption. It involves an extra level of commitment and discretion on the part of the chain of practitioners, including managers; though in sponsored shows it is usually a pre-agreed arrangement. This ensures that the messages scrolled on-screen but not engaged with in the show, as well as many others, have some chance of being responded to. To check this, a PiMA researcher sent a test message to a *Power Breakfast* interview on a Judiciary conference on 19 August 2014. The message was not scrolled on-screen or read on-air but the following morning, an official from the Office of the Ombudsman phoned the researcher to find out how they could be of help.¹⁰

Opinion expressed, opinion ignored or crux downplayed

There were times when participants felt close to having their views addressed directly after they were selected by a practitioner, only for their question or comment not to get such a response. About a week after the March 2013 Kenya election, *Cheche* host Amimo read out the following message sent via Facebook from viewer Patrobas on a show featuring Johnston Sakaja, chairman of The National Alliance (TNA) party of eventual presidential winner, Uhuru Kenyatta (Citizen TV – Sakaja, 2013 at 55:10): "Peace, peace but not justice. Feeling aggrieved. Uneasy calm at the expense of asking difficult questions". The host might try to ensure the

¹⁰ This is a public accountability office, headed by a Senior Principal Magistrate who is also Deputy Registrar in the Office of the Chief Justice.

sensitive issue is responded to, but the guest can eschew the manufacturing consent crux – resulting in an unclear response to a question from the host on payment of election-time party agents.

Two weeks after March 2013 Kenya election, a message from viewer Indakwa of Shirotisa scrolled on-screen in a *Cheche* show:

In case supreme court finds CORD [Coalition for Reforms and Democracy] won the election, can the supreme court declare [presidential aspirant and CORD leader] Raila the winner? Please ask on my behalf. (Citizen TV – Mutua, 2013)

A few messages appealed to the host in this manner, but there was no direct response, possibly because selection of messages by production team in the backroom occurred independently of selections by the host from the two databases, the SMS system and social media, specifically Facebook. In another show (Citizen TV – Njeru, 2013), the practitioners conveyed a message from an anonymous viewer who expressed frustration because the guest was not answering questions: “A viewer sends a question Macharia is unable to answer”. The practitioners here show that the viewer is monitoring the guest’s response to questions from other viewers – and that viewers are also monitoring whether such questions are answered and the quality of answers provided.

Opinion expressed but derailed or cut short

Typically, these interactive TV shows rarely allow phone-ins. However, on one occasion a few days before Kenya’s March 2013 general election, two *Power Breakfast* interviewers and the production team allowed a few calls on the topic of post-election violence crimes against humanities facing presidential candidate Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto at the International Criminal Court (ICC). The discourse was fraught with raw emotions from the two guests and two callers, one of them was another ICC suspect, radio journalist Joshua Sang who called to support the candidacy of former Prime Minister, Raila Odinga. The other caller, who phoned to support the candidacy of Kenyatta and Ruto, was cut short as she hurled insults live on-air directed at one of the guests whose main argument was that Kenyatta and Ruto should not have sought to lead the country unless they were found innocent of the very serious charges relating the previous (2007) election. In the 2007 elections, Ruto and Odinga, who then belonged to the same camp, accused the camp of eventual winner Mwai Kibaki, supported by Kenyatta, of vote theft. This incident showed the risks posed to practitioners and stations in managing telephone interactions in a live TV show.

Limits to expression

Well-known hosts and panellists such as Makali (2013) may claim their independence, but there remain contextual limits to what they can say, or allow to be expressed, on air. These are imposed by legal-regulatory, political, commercial, historical, social/cultural and professional considerations. Makali asserts:

Feedback [from viewers] is normally very unregulated and [un]censored, and therefore ... we don’t just pick anything and say it on air that could be defamatory and that has legal implications. But people respond based on emotions, preferences, based on relation, based on political affiliations, ethnic affiliations, and so on. The motivations are numerous, some of them are not objective and are based on dislike, history. (Makali, 2013)

In 2013-2014, issues of ethnicity and agitation for protest or ‘mass action’, which were tolerable 10-20 years earlier, were raw and sensitive due to the 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya. There was general hostility to attempts by anyone, including media people, to go against propagandistic preaching of ‘peace’ – with some viewers of *Cheche* sending messages to hosts expressing concerns whenever it was perceived they were crossing the line. A host of *Cheche* commented, “Why do you media want to divide us? We are fine ... these questions you are asking us are going to make us hate each other” (Amimo, 2013).

One key event shaping limitations on expression among Kenyan TV and radio practitioners was the arraignment in the ICC of Joshua Sang for crimes against humanities charges linked to his work as a talk show host on the Kalenjin language radio station, Kass FM. He “took calls specifically designated by the networks” involved in killing ethnic “rivals” in the country’s Rift Valley Province during the post-election violence.¹¹ We have narrated above what happened when Sang phoned in to a charged live *Power*

¹¹ The prosecution’s lead trial lawyer, Anton Steynberg during ICC hearing on 10 September 2013 (accessed via live broadcast).

Breakfast show on ICC and election in March 2013. *Power Breakfast* host Mwakazi asserted, “We had to stop the interview because it was getting into a tribal kind of fight, and people were now close to throwing insults ... the kind of air that was building up” (Mwakazi, 2013).

One common challenge for hosts and panellists is when a show is sponsored, and the sponsor defines the terms of the debate in some ways (Fraser, 2016). In these, hosts still try to creatively get around the restrictions or ‘controls’. This is what Amimo (2013) had to say on a series on devolution: “We had some slots for the sponsoring organisations, but we also thought of the people who have an interest in the specific issue ... we invited them”. Makali (2013) elaborates on a *Power Breakfast* series that ran for two-three months in 2013:

When a show is sponsored such as that of Transparency International [TI] ... the content is geared towards achieving a certain objective ... certain things asked or certain directions taken ... that is a guided show. ... so they are the ones who frame the question ... because they are interested in getting the feedback for the onward action by themselves.

Format dynamism, public opinion and practitioners’ performance

Sometimes practical professional considerations, such as preparedness and other foibles, impact on a show inadvertently. Panellist Makali (2013) says due to the pressure of a live show and “eagerness to ... put somebody on the dock”, at times they forget ‘opinion-giving’ ethos: “Well the dynamics of the show are complex ... the show ... sometimes falls short because we may not know and some of the things we deal with are beyond our scope”. Indeed viewers sometimes comment on apparent practitioner foibles. Out of seven comments in a YouTube archive of one show (Citizen TV – Sakaja 2013), two were critical of Makali: “Makali please do some little homework and do not allow yourself to look ignorant,” wrote Sam pp. Another YouTube user, Titan1AB, commented: “Makali *bwana* [Sir or mate] go back to permutation class ASAP and stop embarrassing yourself”. At other times, the hosts and panellists are quite prepared (Citizen TV – Wanyande, 2013).

Sometimes viewers are just not happy with the way the practitioners handle the guests and participants:

When I first started ... I was really insulted ... that I have no manners ... that I should let people talk, and I was like: ‘What do you mean? I should let people talk for ten minutes?’ ... there isn’t so much of that now. (Amimo, 2013)

Others have been annoyed that their messages were not read on air:

I think it’s showing that ... they have more powers than they previously thought they did; but it also gives them a voice which is presumably why the texters get upset: ‘I sent a message why didn’t you read it?’ (Amimo, 2013)

In some cases, practitioners responded directly on air to viewers’ comments about their ilk in coverage of political issues. For example, on electoral flaws and supreme court challenge, *Power Breakfast* host Mwakazi, who prior to 4 March 2013 general election was upbeat about IEBC (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission), said: “We failed in terms of telling the people the truth; there were warning signals” (Citizen TV – Mutua, 2013). This gave the impression that all opinions, including those critical of the practitioners, had a chance to go on air.

Ethical and positional challenges

In Zambia, perception of bias led station boss Phiri to withdraw from a breakfast show he was hosting and in one edition of *The Assignment* viewers “turned against” host Mwansa, with “three quarters” of SMS against him (Phiri 2012a). In another edition of *The Assignment* featuring civil society organisation leader McDonald Chipenzi (Muvi TV – Chipenzi, 2013), which attracted 60 Facebook posts within two hours, viewer Collins Mwamba, lamenting he was “overly getting worried”, blamed the host for guest bias. While saying Muvi TV is not politically aligned, the station’s Director of Administration said individuals involved have particular views: “Maybe as an individual I have my own way of looking at issues” (Tembo 2011). One concern here is the extent to which viewer participation is manipulated. Although some interviewees acknowledged there were concerns about perceived political biases of panellists, Njau and Makali (Amimo, 2013), we found no evidence or report of their direct manipulation of participation; though this does not necessarily imply none existed. Makali himself commented:

Positions I have taken have tended to be positions also shared by CORD, for example, or ODM [Orange Democratic Movement] previously. So people pigeon-hole you, box you, brand you, to try and make you look like you are not objective, and Mutegi people also brand him and project him ... the truth is, in this country you must take a position of some sort, right or wrong ... that is not ... political affiliation. (Makali, 2013)

Through our observations and interviews, we find that the likelihood of such manipulation of audience participation appears to be low in TV talk shows because of relatively little active engagement that occurs through messages, as compared to call-in shows. Given there are relatively few regular participants, stakes appear low – although it was especially difficult to establish contact with these ‘serial’ texters to probe possibilities of manipulation. In the one episode in which the content and structure of the show might have opened up space for manipulation from different quarters - the Citizen TV show on the ICC trial in which a small phone-in window was opened uncharacteristically - we were unable to follow up as the station declined to provide callers’ data.

Representing ordinary citizens: Amplifying vox populi

Hosts and panellists on interactive broadcast shows described themselves as trying to level the playing field so that it is not just the voice of the elites that dominate the airwaves: “We are the eyes for the people and we are the people that should put politicians or whoever it is on their toes and be able to look over the shoulder,” said Muvi TV’s Director of Administration, Alfred Tembo (2011). He explained, “On live programmes ... time is given for people to text in and the text and the questions are shown to the politician ... to answer”. Makali (2013) holds himself as “a representative of the public ... a custodian of public good” and enumerates their show functions as “public participation in public affairs ... advance accountable governance ... enlighten the public.” Indeed we observed a number of shows, for instance that relating to the Judiciary (Citizen TV – Shollei, 2013) and during a TI series on corruption, in which the host passed on viewer SMS to guests from public and voluntary sectors, flagging it up for action (see above). Amimo suggests that text messages or SMS can help to overcome different dimensions of inequality:

The duty of the text messages has been to mend the artificial labels that separate us in terms of educational background, financial status and so on ... when you see the questions coming in, people are asking the same questions regardless of their background, regardless of their ethnicity, ... regardless of their educational achievements, even if it is in broken English or broken Swahili, you know....it will still be the same question. (Amimo, 2013)

Practitioners see themselves as representing the views of ordinary people in a way that suggests they perceive themselves to be roughly aware of audience views. They only occasionally would draw on audience input to refresh their own conversations. For example, Amimo suggests:

There are many things that the public do not have access to so we are able to view things on their behalf. We are able to go into places that others can’t, have access to situations and individuals others can’t. (Amimo, 2013)

On the 25 September 2013, *Cheche* host said on the show that “Kenyans are angry, they are outraged, how we get accountability from those charged with protecting us?” In a show on the delay of court cases featuring former Registrar of the Judiciary, Gladys Shollei, Amimo very well brought in what people were saying and captured the views of the people. In another show featuring politicians Kithure Kindiki and Irungu Kang’ata on the 5 June 2013, she said, “[the] majority of the viewers are texting in angrily” on a controversial proposal, and “That is the sense am getting from the feedback that is coming, surely would it not be fraudulent of me not to say that?” (Amimo, 2013).

Filtering views or opinions in public interest if not in the interest of time

It is impossible for interactive show hosts to accommodate all opinions. They must pick and choose – but apart from legal/regulatory consideration, on what basis do they select or discard public contributions? One is quality of participation. An administrator for Muvi TV suggested, “Texting you can edit, when a person texts and if he is saying something which is outrageous, you know at least not to put it on air” (Tembo, 2011). For TV, this pliability to control makes SMS preferable to live phone calls. “We look for what makes sense, what is rational in the context of our discussion to put on air, which then forms part of our archives,” argues Makali (2013), invoking a reminder of the conditions of an ideal Habermasian public sphere. Similarly *Cheche* host, Amimo, asserts:

I select messages that reflect or move the conversation along ... that reflect a point of view or opinion ... Then to capture or sum up a particular position or feeling, for instance, if you look at the text messages sometimes you get like ten pages of text, of course you are not going to read ten pages of text but say for instance Gladys Shollei, she had more supporters than she had detractors, and so I would say if you have got more support than criticism. (Amimo, 2013)

Another consideration is the perceived popularity of views, especially in relation to incitement to violence:

There is a lot of vitriol coming in and leave it at that because there is no point giving it some kind of a platform. ... this is not a culture that is accustomed to just difficult questions of interrogating leaders. ... I do remember when I called somebody "silly" on air, I started reading and then, am not sure what the text was, but it was offensive, because you know you skim and I had not gotten the full text, and I said on air that "that is silly". I just thought it was silly, and then somebody texted asking why that comment was silly. (Amimo, 2013)

So what happens if you are on air and somebody says you know those people from the north of the country should all be shot and taken out. So as much as it is a democracy, what do you do? ... that's where we come in ... I think the challenge for Kenya, is that even the people who were called to be journalists, and who are practising journalism are not necessarily steeped in the values of journalism. (Amimo, 2013)

For those who feel their views never get read, especially by particular hosts, Amimo (2013) explains that it is often because of time constraints or their opinions could be reflected by other viewers rather than have known ones dominate. "We knew their names," Amimo (2013) elaborates in reference to similar experiences at the BBC. In any case, the practitioners often prioritise the contributions of guests and their own contributions, limiting viewer input:

It's time and balance, you have three people minus myself on the show, they are not decorative pieces, especially if you got a newsmaker who hasn't answered these questions before, or is hardly accessible. (Amimo, 2013)

Strengthening the role of a 'credible opposition' in democratic politics

Interactive shows in some way add some value in opposition politics. When *Cheche* had top opposition politician Wetangula on 18 September 2013, host Amimo and the panellists talked about the need for the Coalition for Reform and Democracy (CORD) to improve on their communication strategy. However, the dilemma is that the journalists do not want to be seen as favouring one party when they do this; for example, Amimo comments, "I don't see myself helping them to be anything? I am just giving them feedback" (Amimo 2013).

Helping resolve thorny political matters

Resolution of particularly difficult political deadlocks or stalemates or national issue is one area that practitioners of interactive shows attempt to play a role in. In one case, a *Cheche* host tried to broker a deal between the two main political coalitions through the course of the show: "Are there any other agreements we could have brokered here on *Cheche* as a result of your time on the programme today ... in the interest of Kenyans?" (CTV – Orenge & Kindiki, 2013). Keen to get commitment beyond the show, Amimo pressed further: "How are we following this up beyond putting up good ideas on *Cheche* and there is no follow-up? ... What are you committing to? ... Will there be a meeting next week, next month to do this?" (Citizen TV – Orenge & Kindiki, 2013).

In Kenya, devolution was a controversial topic commonly raised during fieldwork. Taking cue from Amimo in the same August 2013 show, *Cheche* panellist Makali argued it was a "good idea" to have "a national conference on devolution to resolve this perpetual wrangling". Another common topic on interactive shows in Kenya was insecurity; in another show five weeks later, *Cheche* host Amimo called for a national security council meeting (Citizen TV – Kamama, 2013). Months later in 2014, CORD coalition leader Raila Odinga returned from a three-month visit to the United States calling for national dialogue on various issues. The fact that key CORD strategist Orenge was in a show where the journalists portrayed the opposition as lacking strategy and doled pieces of advice on the way forward may not necessarily mean much but it points to some form of germination of ideas – however far-fetched this possible causality may be. Indeed, on the shows, journalists at times 'guide' protagonists or offer solutions as catalysts or 'brokers' during stalemate through 'media mediation' (Shivar 2000). This raises a question about what motivates journalists to interject in this way. *Cheche* panellist Makali explains:

Because I am a leader in my own right, people listen to me, take my word and I am relied upon to advice, my opinion counts. My opinion counts; in fact, surprisingly, some of these facts are taken up, like in the case of the fights around devolution. (Makali 2013)

For some hosts, the resolution of an issue or debate on the broadcast is so important that they request the producer to extend show time in order to exhaust an issue. While *Cheche* lasts an hour, compared to 'Power Interview', which typically lasts 30 minutes, host Amimo has asked for extra time in order to comprehensively cover a topic and if possible resolve issues. While an extension of around ten minutes is common, there are some extreme cases when time was nearly doubled, for example, in a show featuring the head of a regional think tank who was perceived to be sympathetic to the ruling party. Amimo asserts, "We haven't exhausted the issues. We have not resolved anything and, for instance, the feedback from viewers especially on such shows, you want to carry on and engage them" (Amimo, 2013).

Social and cultural attitudes of hosts and panellists

Another aspect of the attitudes of hosts and panellists is social/cultural. On gender, a key aspect of social divide that shaped affirmative actions in 2013 elections, various journalists were found to bring to work their positions. In one show, *Cheche* panellist Njau and a guest invited the hostility of the host for drifting to a chat analogising political coalitions to customary practice of polygamy (which was recently legalised) in a manner she felt demeaning to women. One viewer Kariuki George Kariuki, commenting on this incident, noted, "a raw nerve was touched in the analogy" (Citizen TV – Kindiki 2013, Part 3). The host's displeasure was picked up by a blogger (Obiajulu, 2013) who monitors media issues in Kenya:

She told the two off for their analogy in no uncertain terms. The two men laughed uneasily and were all too happy to move on to the next topic and questions. But Uduak was not done there. She brought up her distaste again when she went over the comments and questions from the viewers. I was actually quite impressed that she voiced her dismay at the analogy. Most other women would just have sat there and endured uncomfortable situation.

Although she avoided expressing her 'stand' on the performance of political groupings or individuals for the obvious fear of being accused of taking sides, on gender matters the *Cheche* host asserts a clear position:

On women issues, if women are being disrespected, say for instance people coming and calling women names on my show, the first time we had Bonny Khalwale in the show, he said something ridiculous about inter-tribal marriage, as I was closing and I remember I was like, "What did you say?" (Amimo, 2013)

Discussion and conclusion

Looking at the cases of Muvi TV's *The Assignment*, and *Power Breakfast* and *Cheche* on Citizen TV, individual media practitioner's attributes, such as training, experience, convictions and preparedness, at times play a significant role in design and conduct of shows. Journalists try to portray themselves as objective, fair and neutral but our findings show that more factors than they would be prepared to admit influence their work. One promotional advertisement by NTV, quoting Managing Editor Linus Kaikai, reads: "Everyone's entitled to their opinion. I don't bring mine to work" (Olewe, 2013). At Citizen TV, hosts and panellists take the opposite approach in *Power Breakfast / Cheche*; they prioritise their own opinions and those of guests. All the same, they perceive their roles as vital in giving voice to viewers to hold guests and their institutions, such as the Judiciary, to account. They do this by selecting a variety of comments that best capture sentiments of citizens in relation to services and issues under discussion.

In contrast to potential individual interventions and influence, given restrictions of our TV premises access to specific times and periods, we could not verify reports of proprietor influence on participation – especially in *Power Breakfast / Cheche* where, through interviews and observations, we deduced that practitioners often deliberated and decided on guests and management of the shows. However, we noted that some 'Power Interview' shows were sponsored but even such shows tended to be advocacy-oriented and the topics, such as corruption, were often of public interest with participation negotiated with practitioners rather than rigidly prescribed. All the same, we did not detect such subtle funding influence on participation in the flagship *Cheche* show.

Returning to the nature of audience participation, unlike in radio, TV interactivity is mostly through messaging rather than calling-in, partly due to the nature of the technology. Unless the caller is on video, which would be difficult due to low internet bandwidth in these countries, it is awkward watching the studio panel listen to a caller that neither they nor the viewer, who is 'watching them listening', can see. At Muvi TV, taking phone calls was not unusual in the earlier years (Tembo, 2011; Phiri, 2012a) but during our 2014-15 fieldwork phone calls were not a feature of the show: "Calls I think the difficult party is you can't control them, if a person is insulting they will have already insulted but with text of course you are able to control" (Phiri, 2012a). In Kenya's case, sensitivity to phone-in for TV interactivity was more than technological.

In an ethnically divided society like Kenya's, journalists, including talk show hosts and panellists, have the challenge of conveying the opinions of others while trying to avoid exhibition of their own view in a manner that could be perceived as politically aligned. This is why in *Cheche*, host Amimo goes to great lengths to attempt to exhibit neutrality as the two panellists Makali and Njau are often viewed as partisan for one reason or another. Ethnic-linked political tensions, materialising in the 2007-2008 post-election violence, are issues Kenyans have to confront to resolve but they were political hot potatoes during our study period. The panellists were burdened by perceptions about their ethnic belonging and assumed political affiliations; in one instance an attempt to allow viewer participation in live debate about the ICC via phone-in was abandoned when it degenerated into shouting and abuses. Citizen TV did not upload this and other controversial episodes on YouTube. These tensions make interactive broadcasting practitioners fearful and cautious as they personally take responsibility for the content that go on air – including from the audience they give voice. Such self-censorship appears likely to continue to affect interactive broadcasting in Kenya for the next few years, thereby limiting the extent to which this space can hold politicians and civil servants to account. In Zambia, sensitivity is about perception of private stations such as Muvi TV as 'anti-government' thus inviting hostility – including intimidation by party 'cadres'.

Despite the structural factors that constrain or enable interactivity, and despite their personal human weaknesses, the 'auteurs' such as Citizen TV's *Cheche* host Amimo and Muvi TV's *The Assignment* host Mwansa saw themselves, and were seen by audiences, guests and political elites, as key drivers and celebrities that shape access and nature of participation. While these TV stations and shows are popular, the 'auteurs' are in a competitive environment – which includes 'sharing' some of the 'serial' participants. Some of Kenya's best-known interactive broadcast 'auteurs'-stars are former CNN correspondent Jeff Koinange (K24 then KTN), former up-market thespian Jimmi Gathu (Citizen TV then K24) and radio presenter Caroline Mutoko (Capital FM then Kiss 100 FM radios). In Zambia, Mwansa stood out. Each 'auteur' has distinctive style and mien – idiosyncrasies they often take along with them to different stations – even though the interactive shows they host also have aspects that are unique to institutional and structural 'auteurs', the 'host' stations and media companies.

Overall, the conduct and content of interactive shows are affected by corporate and individual interests-gains. Sponsored shows, in which companies and lobby groups that include civil society organisations buy space to push their agenda, often restrict how journalists can effectively use their skills to cover a topic. At individual level, some hosts and panellists (as well as some of the more regular/serial contributors from the public) understandably exploit their elevated platform to pursue personal ambitions or gains. Such personal, political or commercial pursuits present discernible ethical dilemmas in the eyes of keen watchers – even if imperceptible to, or downplayed by, the practitioner. Our straightforward image of how the practitioners made interactivity work, or not work, is that they do, or don't, put message from posters or texters directly 'in conversation' with the guests in these shows, intended to provide space for interactivity. Our findings show both that the stations and intermediary agencies constrain and control what voices get on air, and that, under specific circumstances, they also strengthen and amplify particular voices that present their concerns in particular and prescribed ways.

Conscious of the structure-versus-agency debates in Africa's reform politics (Keller 1996), we have in this paper examined, but not over-privileged, media practitioners' agential role in selected interactive TV shows. Individual hosts such as Muvi TV's Mwansa and Citizen TV's Amimo, supported by the producer team and/or panellists, come across as central to the 'meaning' of interactive broadcasting. In that sense, the paper draws attention to variation, centred on the host and supporting practitioners, as an important and unique focus on interactive broadcasting. The paper shows the plausibility of arguments that see individual Africans as worthy of study, and as making a difference to history, in this case, practitioners of popular interactive TV shows. It demonstrates that any kind of deterministic account that focuses on media liberalisation per se, or mobile technology per se, as having determining political effects, pays too little attention to agential power. Instead, this paper demonstrates the convening power of the station and host. Our approach also looks beyond 'capacity' and 'skills' of media professionals, which are often considered to be apolitical and technical questions, as if any given host with the right set of skills could conduct their work in the same way – implying the practitioner is imagined as not bringing their own views and agendas.

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